



Live the life you want.

From: Ronza Othman, President
National Federation of the Blind of Maryland
15 Charles Plaza, #3002
Baltimore, MD 21201 president@nfbmd.org

To: House Health Committee

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the House Health Committee to give a favorable report to HB1445 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Developmental Disabilities Administration - Home- and Community-Based Services Eligibility Determinations (Maryland Protecting People With Disabilities Act). Primarily, this bill repeals the 90-day deadline for appealing on disability determinations for Maryland Medicaid.

All disabled people deserve accommodations which allow us to be gainfully-employed and to contribute to the advancement of society. These accommodations sometimes include things you might expect someone to need at work, including stretch breaks, a human reader, etc. These accommodations might also include things a non-disabled person could overlook, including prescription drug coverage. For example, if someone has ADHD and/or severe migraines, they may need prescription medication to enable them to be successful in work, school, and other aspects of daily living. Medication and medical appointments may seem personal, but it's all related.

Eligibility for services like the Maryland Medical Assistance Program is heavily dependent on income. Between 21% and 26% of disabled people are considered low-income, with about 22% struggling to afford basic living expenses, which would include food and medication. It is also worth noting how disabled people typically incur disability-related expenses non-disabled people do not, including fees for extra medical visits, medications, assistive technology, transportation, etc. When one considers these extra expenses, the low-income rate among disabled people makes sense. We encounter employment discrimination and implicit biases, with employers believing that our disabilities, which we cannot control, make us less productive, less worthy of jobs. We have to spend more and make less, although we have the same goal of being gainfully-employed, contributing to society, and living satisfying lives. Repealing the appeal deadline will help eliminate this barrier.

Another motivator for repealing the appeal deadline is related to when and how people receive information. For example, if a blind person receives the information as a piece of print mail, but is unable to read it until their reader visits two weeks later, it has already been fourteen out of the ninety days. Not to mention, sometimes it takes a week for the person to receive their mail. In this example, twenty-one of the ninety days have already passed. Other relevant factors may include availability of medical providers, availability of a printer, technology literacy, etc. Not to mention, when does the appeal deadline start? Is it the postmark date of the mail? The date the mail was physically received? The date the mail gets opened? An appeal deadline is an inherently ableist system which should be eliminated.

For those reasons and others, we ask for a favorable report on HB1445. For questions, please contact me at President@nfbmd.org or at 443-426-4110.